

## Youth Program Focuses on International Game Play

Reprinted from the Sun-Sentinel  
Written by Junette Reyes, Staff Writer

At NSU University School, board games are considered educational tools and not just a source of entertainment. Students from first through fifth grade in the Lower School have been exposed to carefully selected board games from around the world all year long through the Mind Lab program. The curriculum uses strategy games to help kids develop various skills involving critical thinking and teamwork.

Debbie Kahn, a teacher and coordinator of the program, said each grade level has different games assigned to them as the year progresses. Before learning how to play up to three board games each month, the students are first given examples of realistic events related to the main goal, such as instances where working together as a team is necessary.



"Some kids always want to be the leader, so they learn this isn't their turn to be the leader and that they need to take a step back and think in a different way," Kahn said.

Different strategies are then discussed and eventually applied to daily life situations the kids can relate to once the class starts playing. Kahn emphasized the steps taken to successfully complete a game are more important than actually winning. They also talk about good sportsmanship, as each game starts and ends with a handshake.

"Many of these bright kids are so used to being taught something and getting it right away," said Kahn. "They learn that it's okay to fail, and just the concept of knowing it's going to take you five times to try this to be able to actually solve the puzzle and not give up and not get frustrated."

The students tend to come up with their own strategies along the way, taking the role of teacher as they share them with the entire class. This in turn helps the students develop their presentation skills, as they practice expressing their ideas during the lesson.

Mind Lab culminates every year in a school tournament among the third, fourth, and fifth grade students. The kids have the choice to compete in one of four games and typically choose the one that they do best. This year's games were Abalone, Checkers, Quoridor, and Octi.

Dylan Liberty, a fifth-grade student, said Abalone is his favorite game. While he did not feel ready enough to compete, he said he gets better at the game every year. "From first grade to now, each game I've played and learned had a message to it, like trial and error or being patient," said Liberty. "In total, I think life lessons were the most important thing I got out of this amazing experience."

Fifth grader Avery Redlich won first place in her favorite game of Quoridor during the tournament. Redlich said she learned a lot about patience, as well as thinking about her actions before making a decision. "You should never rush while you're taking a test or doing school work, just like you shouldn't rush while making a move in the tournament game," said Redlich. "If you take your time and try your hardest, you can win it all."